



Creating your digital identity

A guide for artists and
creatives

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What's the point?

For many artists – now more than ever – an online presence is the foundation of a ‘successful’ practice. It is how artists connect with their audience, their supporters, and collaborators and is a primary route to financial stability through sales, funding, and partnerships.

But being ‘online’ isn’t simple and for many artists it can be overwhelming and confusing, meaning they miss out on the potential perks. It feels like there is a lot to do, from marketing yourself, running websites and social media accounts, and documenting your work in a presentable and shareable way.

We have compiled this resource for any artist looking to improve their online presence, using our own experience, advice from Shape Artists, and the thoughts and reflections of our wider network.

What follows is not prescriptive and no artist should expect to be an expert in all areas! Hopefully, however, it will spark inspiration and shed light on what is quickly becoming a necessity for creatives: digital identity.

As ever at Shape, we endeavour to integrate accessible solutions from the beginning. So, instead of a designated chapter on ‘accessibility,’ we have littered this resource with accessibility tips and advice as-and-when they prove relevant.

Step one: who are you?

An obvious question, perhaps, but when creating a network online where people might not know you, it's an important one. On most digital platforms like social media, you will need a 'bio,' which is a very brief summary of who you are.

Your bio is one of the first things new people will see about you, so it's a good idea to have a clear, concise, and impactful format for explaining what you do. For example, this is the Shape Twitter bio:

“Disability-led, we work to remove barriers to creative excellence. Our vision: an inspiring and inclusive arts sector.”

For larger groups or those of you who work in collectives or groups, you can write the short 'group bio.' For our

Shape-NDACA project, the bio was: “a group of disabled people and their allies who broke barriers, helped change the law, and made great culture and art about their struggle.”

How much space you have to write your bio will vary from site to site and the necessary tone might vary, too. On some platforms you might feel as though you should be more informal than on others. An easy way to judge this is to look to the profiles of artists you are already aware of – see how it's been done before!

Once you've written a short description of yourself (and maybe found a nice picture to go along with it), you can begin to think about the kind of content you will be sharing. For that, it's a good idea to create a...

Marketing Plan!

Alongside Artsadmin, we published a [PR and Marketing Resource for Artists](#) for Unlimited. You can follow the link to find the full version, but here we have condensed and updated our advice.

A marketing plan is a strategy you can implement to 'market' your 'business.' In this case, to 'market your business' means to promote your practice, which may also involve selling your work. It sounds intimidating, but a marketing plan can be very simple.

You can use SMART to help you get started: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed. Set goals for yourself. How do you want to be perceived? Who do you want to notice you? Are there specific publications or places you would like to be featured? Or have you got your eyes set on a particular community you would like to belong to?

Once you have a goal, you can establish ways to measure your success. This can be anything from how many followers you manage to gain within a particular time frame all the way up to detailed statistics and metrics. Do what you feel comfortable with but, most importantly,

what you feel will actually be useful for you.

For example, if you are trying to become well-known within a specific art community, you might want to monitor how many others from within the community follow and engage with you. If your goal is to sell more work, you can easily track how many people visit your online shop and how many sales are processed.

If you feel your goal is a priority within your practice, it would be a good idea to check in on these measurements regularly. If you want a more relaxed approach though, it's okay to occasionally check in and see how things are going.

Marketing plans can be useful for specific events, too, such as the release of a new work or exhibition, or a campaign you are a part of. You can plan what content you will be sharing, what you want to achieve by sharing it, and then measure your success afterwards.

A note on language

How you talk about your practice is important because it can bring in new audiences and spark new conversations, which can benefit you both artistically and financially.

It is therefore necessary to describe your practice in a way that is as widely understandable as possible.

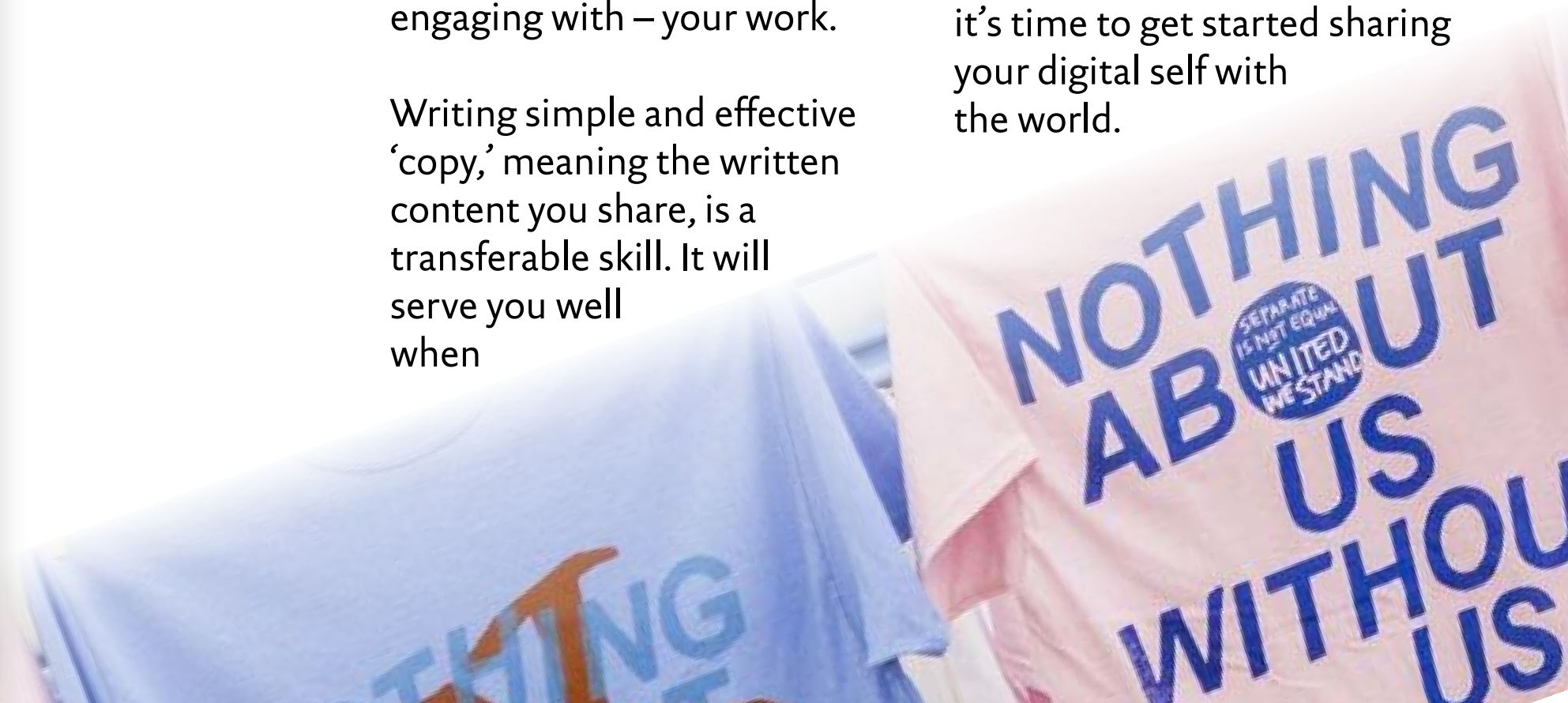
Using complex and unnecessarily challenging language can prevent a lot of potential audience members from understanding – and engaging with – your work.

Writing simple and effective 'copy,' meaning the written content you share, is a transferable skill. It will serve you well when

writing longer pieces, such as blogs, and fitting everything you want to communicate into limited spaces, such as a Tweet.

It is also a good example of one way you can build accessibility into your practice from the foundations. Everyone benefits from this kind of consideration, including you as your audience gets bigger!

Once you are happy with the profiles you've created for yourself and the way you have communicated your practice, it's time to get started sharing your digital self with the world.



Accessibility top tips!

Alt Text

Writing image descriptions is one of the most effective things you can do to make your content more accessible. Most social media sites offer alt-text functions but a lot of the third-party management tools do not. You may have to write your image descriptions into your content yourself. Use it as an opportunity to be creative, but don't forget the purpose - make sure alt-texts are clear, concise, and consistent.

Content Notes

Content notes, also known as 'Trigger Warnings,' are tags written at the top of content to alert your audience to themes within the work. They can be used to alert your audience to issues that may potentially cause distress so they know ahead of time and can avoid it if they choose to. It's good practice to use content notes and it shows that you have your audience's interests in mind.

Captioning

Writing captions for your video and audio content makes it more accessible and so increases the potential size of your audience. It can sometimes be a lengthy task but there are increasing numbers of AI services for auto-captioning or, if you have the budget, organisations like StageText who caption content for you. Check out [this training from StageText!](#)

Step two: how do you share yourself online?

Our friend and supported artist, [Abi Palmer](#), offered this advice: "I think being playful and informal sometimes rather than trying to sound fully professional has helped me. I get much more

engagement when things are more raw and genuine than when things are very polished and 'curator's space-y'."



Image credit:
Photographer Faith
Aylward and Stylist
mia maxwell

Social Media

As an artist, social media can be a vital vehicle for marketing, selling, and sharing your work. It isn't a prerequisite, but is definitely recommended, even if you only use one platform! Using the internet in this way also allows for great inclusivity in your practice; you can reach a wider audience by allowing people to participate from their homes, on their phones, and from anywhere in the world.

Depending on your practice – what art forms you favour, how you capture it, and how you want to share that – some social media platforms may be better suited to you than others. For most artists, though, Instagram is a very good place to start.

Instagram

You can set up and manage multiple Instagram accounts from one smartphone (and, increasingly as the software is updated, a computer), meaning you do not have to sacrifice your 'personal' account, if you have one, to the 'professionalism' of one for your practice.

Whether you choose to set up an account dedicated to your practice, or combine it with a pre-existing account, it is important you edit your profile to ensure clarity, impact, and memorability. Like we discussed earlier, starting with your 'bio' is a good idea.

Once you have established your account, you need to get to grips with the different ways you can use Instagram:

1. Posting onto your 'grid' and the News Feed

The primary function of Instagram is to allow you to share visual content by posting it to your personal 'grid,' which also means it is shared onto the News Feed of anyone who follows you. You can do this by clicking + symbol in the bottom centre of the screen.

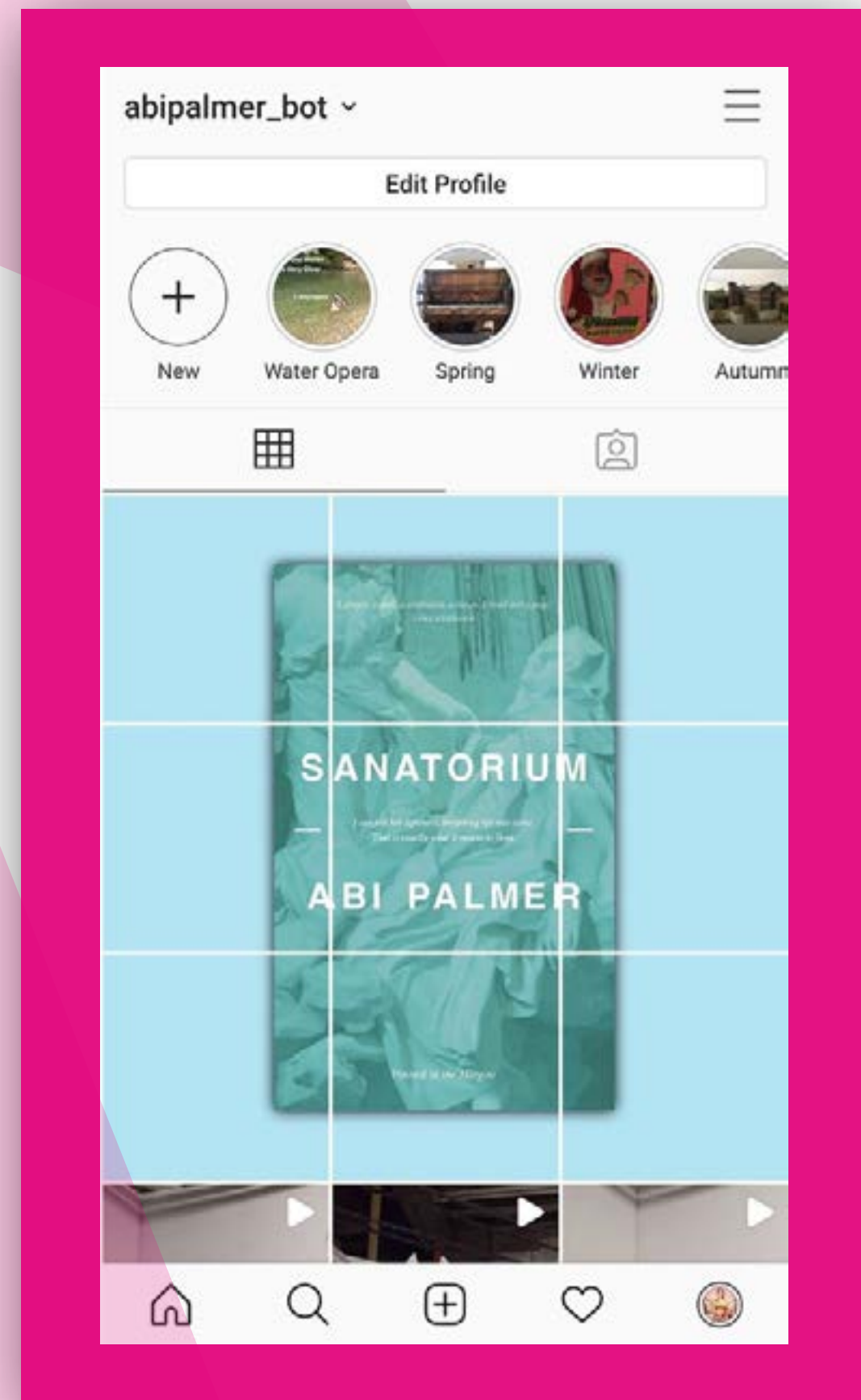
Anything you share must already be saved to the device you're uploading it from, meaning you will either have to use your phone to take photos or create images or have already saved content onto it. As an artist, the quality of the images you share of your work is very important. If you are sharing

pixelated, blurry, dark, or poor images, you will do your work a disservice! We recommend, therefore, that – if you can – you use a good quality camera to capture your work, if it isn't already digital, that is!

Some phone cameras are up to the task, but many aren't. If you don't own a different camera, speak to other artists and creatives in your network and see if anyone would be happy to help you photograph your work.

You can then edit content from within the app itself, so feel free to play around with filters and image settings. Though, if adding things like filters, it's probably a good idea to maintain a similar style throughout all of your posts relating to that work/project. Likewise, when you're sharing something to your grid, it's a good idea to think about what your page will look like once all your posts are on it.

There are lots of platforms available to help you plan the layout of your Instagram grid. These can be beneficial particularly when you are creating marketing material around a specific work, event, or project, as the sum of each post will also serve as content in itself by creating a larger image from the smaller ones. For a good example of splitting images, take a look at this campaign one of our artists, Abi Palmer, created for the recent release of her new book:



[Planoly](#) is a good choice for planning your Instagram posts. You can use it both as an app and on your desktop (though not all features are available on both platforms). Like many similar systems, Planoly allows you to schedule posts ahead of time, so you can organise a large chunk of marketing at once. With a free account, you can create up to thirty posts per month. Other similar systems include [Hootsuite](#), [Later](#), and [Buffer](#).

Planoly offers a few features the others don't, however, including image splitting, allowing you to create a grid like [Abi's](#) above with very minimal effort! It also allows you to schedule posts to your Instagram stories (more on these soon), which few other systems do.

However, most apps offering Instagram planning support do not allow you to write alt-text for the images you share. Alt-text is an image description feature which makes your work more accessible (and makes your audience bigger). Alt-texts are usually concise and literal descriptions of the images you share and can be created from within the Instagram app itself, but rarely elsewhere.

It is important, then, that if you choose to use services like Planoly, you go into the Instagram app often to add alt-texts to your content. This can be done by selecting the 'Advanced Settings' tab at the bottom of the 'Edit' page for your post. In Advanced Settings, there is an option to 'Write Alt Text.'

Once you've decided what content you want to share and how, it's good practice to write accompanying captions. What you write in a caption is really up to you, there aren't

any strict guidelines and artists find success online by using a wide range of tones and voices. It is a good idea, though, while you're still building an audience, to include information about the image you're sharing including any prices, viewing details, and credits. It can also prove effective to use hashtags.

Using hashtags that are popular will mean you appear in the 'Explore Feed' when people search those hashtags, or on the News Feeds of anyone who follows the hashtag directly. Ones like #art, #creative, #painting can all be good, but

they are quite general and so your posts might get lost among many others.

Being more specific while still recognisable, for example: #DisabilityArts, can be better. When you do use hashtags make sure to make them accessible. Hashtags with multiple words in will only be read by screen readers when each word is capitalised!

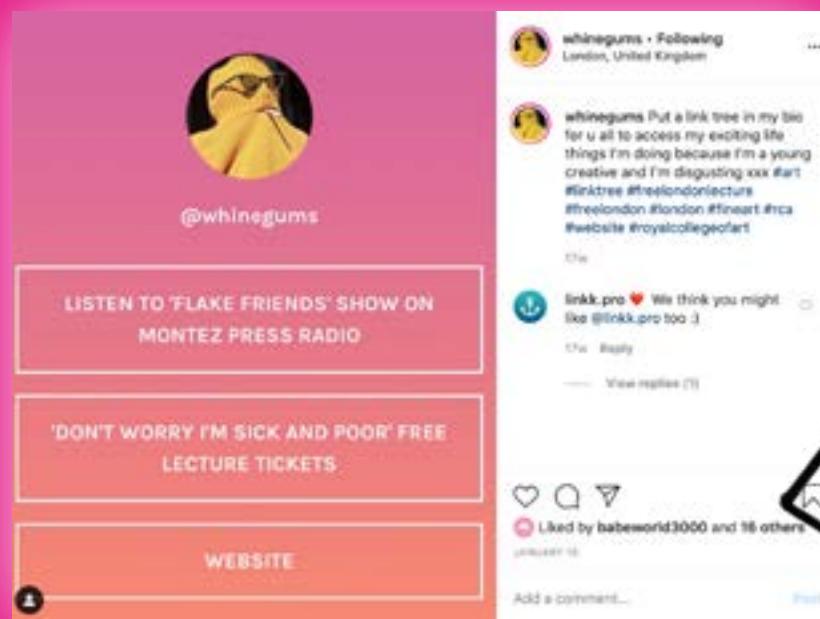


Tips from the Shape team...

1. [LinkTree](#) - a free-to-use site where you can store multiple links to your content. This is useful for putting in your Instagram bio and referring to in your posts, because Instagram doesn't support active links!

2. [Bitly](#) - a link-shortening website which saves vital space in limited communications, such as a Tweet. Just log in, copy and paste your long html, and Bitly will produce a shortened version for you. It also offers analytics, so you can see how many people have followed the link!

3. [Kapwing](#) - a free online video editing service which has an auto-captioning function. Super easy to use and a real lifesaver when sharing video content on social media!



Artist Ellie Harmant-Taylor is making good use of LinkTree here!

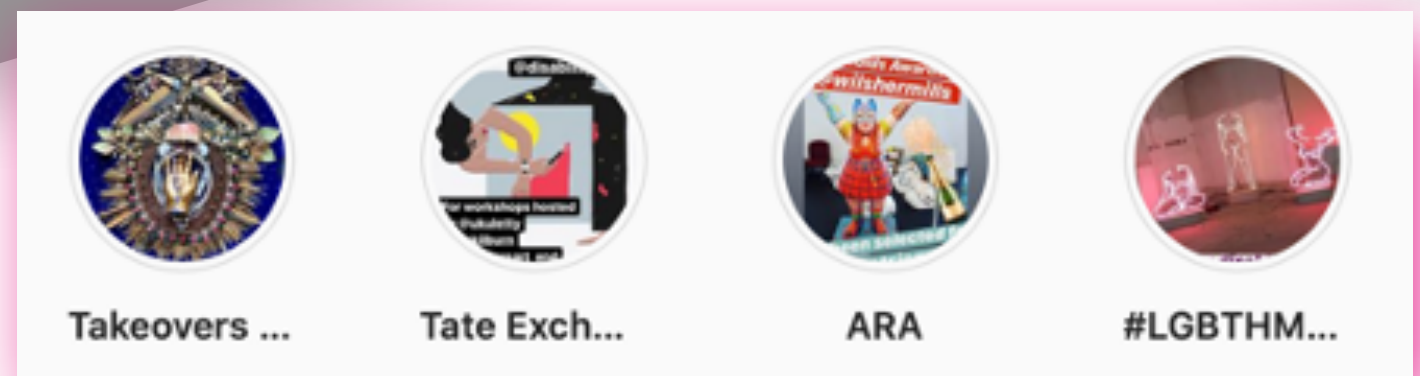


2. Posting to your Instagram 'Story'

The other feature of Instagram is your 'story.' This is a less formal, more interactive, and ephemeral way of sharing content. You can 'post to your story' and it will stay there for 24 hours. Because of the time limit on stories, it's a good idea to use them for less important, lighter content, such as lower quality images you want to share but don't think belong on your grid.

You can also use stories to engage more closely with those who follow you. Instagram has Poll, Q&A, Quiz, Countdown, and Music features, allowing you to create sinteractive content, too. You can also save any stories you think are important or any that belong to a campaign directly to your Instagram page using the 'Highlights' feature. To do this from a recent story, you only need to select the 'Highlight' button in the bottom right when viewing the story. You can, though, retrospectively add to your highlights, by going into your 'Archive' on Instagram and rewatching old stories!

If you are working on multiple projects and want to keep your audience up to date, using Highlights is a really good and engaging way to do so. Here's what the Shape Highlights reel looks like:



Twitter

Twitter can be a less visual social media platform, meaning it is less favoured by artists as a means of self-marketing. That said, it can be effective for participating in discussions within your community or network and gives you greater opportunity to have a 'voice' than other social media platforms. Networks often blossom on Twitter, such as the Disability Arts community, and so staying in-the-loop and getting involved in conversations can be beneficial to your practice both inspirationally and financially.

Twitter has a few functions; the primary being writing 'Tweets.' Tweets are text-based content limited to 280 characters. You can write Tweets that advertise whatever you're working on but also in response to others and to share your own thoughts and reflections.

When you're writing Tweets specifically to market your work, it's a good idea to plan out your 'copy.' Think about the space you have available, what you need to convey, and whether you want to include things like emojis, hashtags, or tags (which will link to other accounts). If you use Tweet scheduling systems such

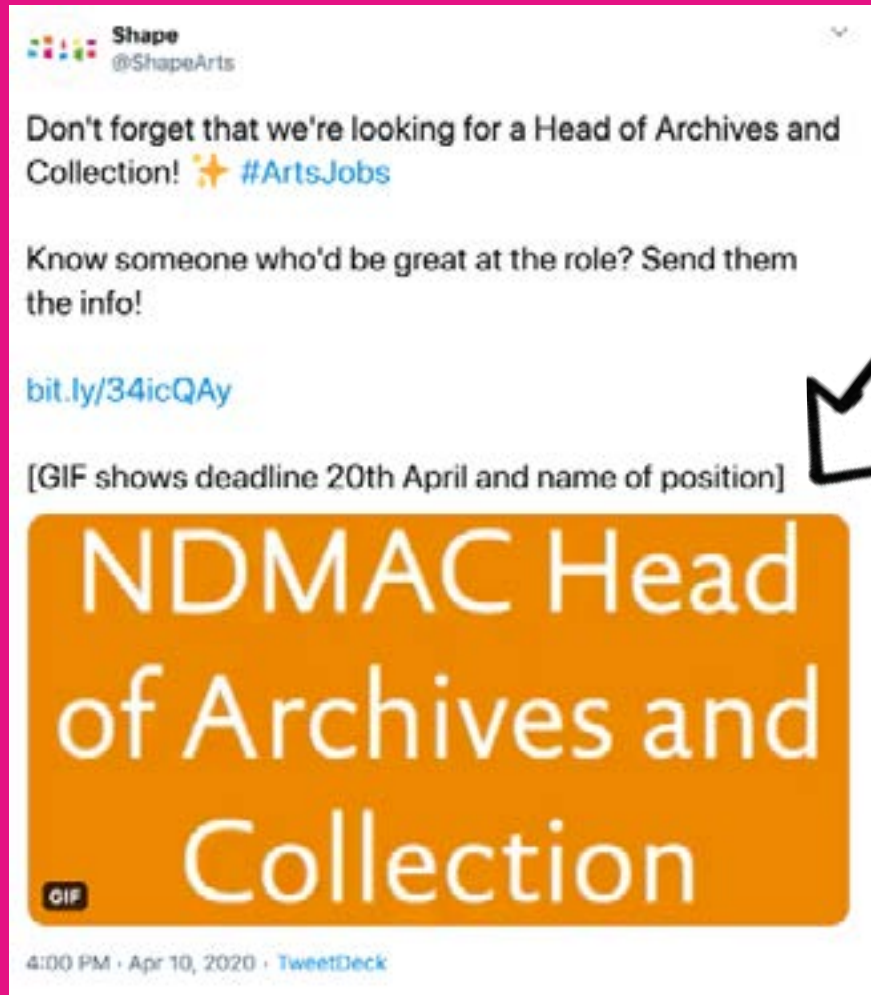
as [Tweetdeck](#) to write your Tweets, you can always edit them before they are published. But once a Tweet is live, it cannot be edited at all, only deleted. Bear this in mind!

If you're part of a campaign or sharing multiple Tweets around the same work, using hashtags can be effective as people can search for them and join in by tweeting using the same tag. Likewise, if you're tweeting about one thing and find you've run out of space in the Tweet, you can create a Thread by replying to yourself, presenting your words as a chain-like conversation to others.

Tweets with accompanying visuals do statistically 'better' than those without. This means that more people engage with them, perhaps by 'Liking,' 'Retweeting,' or following a link you've shared. As a result, this means that the 'Reach' of your Tweet is greater, as it may appear on the News Feeds of people who follow those who've engaged with it.

Twitter can be a good place to share images of your work, but also videos and Gifs (which are somewhere between images and videos!). Whatever you choose to share, make sure you write an alt-text as you would on Instagram. It's easy from within the Twitter app or website, just select the 'Write Alt Text' option when composing your Tweet. From other systems, such as Tweetdeck, the option will appear when you're planning your Tweet.

If for some reason you can't use the Alt Text feature – sometimes when uploading Gifs through third party systems like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite the option is unavailable – try to leave enough space in the Tweet itself to write a description. For example:



Unsure where to start with Twitter? It's a good idea to find one person you want to follow and then see who they're following, talking to, and sharing on their account. Once you begin doing this, your network will begin expanding organically!



Our friend, artist [Lauren Saunders](#), recommends using the [IFFTT](#) (If this then that) tool. The software allows you to post across your social media platforms simultaneously, subject to rules. For example, if you post on Instagram, IFFTT can be set up to automatically share it to Facebook as well.

Here's an Instagram we shared to publicise an interview we did with Lauren!

Lauren's other tips:

"Tag, tag, tag! Everyone who might be involved with what your posting (but only if it's relevant, don't overuse).

Keep your online presence mostly arts related - when people scroll through your Instagram feed looking for your art, pictures of your sausage sandwich from this morning will ruin the overall aesthetic of your feed! Be human and celebrate your achievements - even use social media as online sketchbook - but avoid posting things that undermine or simply don't add value to you and your practice.

Be friendly and helpful on social media, especially when supporting you're own local/virtual community - be a part of conversations and share useful resources."

Facebook

Facebook presents some stickier problems when thinking about marketing. Hashtags, though you can use them, aren't as effective on Facebook as on other sites as people tend not to search for them. Facebook is generally regarded as a much more 'personal' social media platform than something like Twitter, where people prefer to present themselves more 'professionally.'

Whether you find Facebook a worthwhile platform to maintain will be entirely determined by your own circumstances and the specific networks you wish to market yourself to. It's worth doing some research to see if people you look up to have a 'Business' profile on Facebook for themselves or their projects – especially so if you are looking to work in a specific locality.

If you decide Facebook is right for you, here are some things to remember...



You can find Shape Arts on Facebook [here!](#)

It's good to set up a 'Business' profile or a 'Page' which you can manage alongside any 'Personal' Facebook account you may have. This will prevent wires from crossing and allow you to more clearly distinguish between 'Work' and 'Life,' which is always a good idea! Business profiles also allow you to include all the relevant information your audience would need such as contact details and website address.

Facebook algorithms favour 'engagement,' meaning if your posts are 'liked' more and commented on regularly, more people are likely to see them.

Facebook has no word limit. This is good if you want to share longer thoughts and longer pieces of writing but be careful not to create content that might turn people away. If you want to write a blog, it's a good idea to have this set up on your site and then share links to your writing to your social media accounts. This will also increase traffic on your site and so, potentially, sales!

All the same accessibility rules apply – Facebook offers great automated alt text features, or you can write your own, for example.

As Lauren pointed out in her advice, there are many third-party websites and management tools that will automatically post things you share on Instagram or Twitter to Facebook for you, and vice versa. Don't forget you can manage your platforms this way!

A note on management

Sometimes managing your 'digital identity' can feel like a job in itself. It's important not to let it become too big a task to manage or distract you from doing the work you really want to be doing. Using social media management tools like Planoly, Hootsuite, and Tweetdeck is a great way to lessen your workload.

[Sam Metz](#), a Shape supported artist, offered this advice: "I think that currently the lack of staggering with artist funds means that neurodivergent artists particularly are hampered from getting support. Neurodivergent artists typically struggle with executive functioning (ordering and prioritizing tasks).

In terms of my own interests I would like to see a lot more non-verbal approaches to sharing art work in the artworld, that don't require panels and networking and that value alternative forms of communication, such as making workshops to talk about process and making films that share process but don't have to be narrated by the artist."

Sam recommends using the [Todoist](#) and [Ayoya](#) apps to help with task management and executive dysfunction.

Catriona's tips

Keep your social media focused on your work, inspiration etc. Keep your "life" separate.

Treat every customer respectfully whether they are commissioning or buying a piece for £100 or £10,000. Customers do return.

Be interested in your customer. Why do they want a piece of your work? Talk to them, always with a smile on your face.

Know what YOU are about. Know what your WORK is about. You WILL have to write about it and explain it sometimes.

Don't forget customers are buying into YOU!

Put yourself out there. Apply for things. But don't try and fit in.

Be creative, somehow, every day. Feed your creativity. It's a blessing.

BE BRAVE!

You can follow
Catriona on
Instagram here!



Artist website

Though not all artists opt to have a website of their own, it can be useful if your practice involves writing or if you are selling your own work. It can also act as a business card – an easy place for people to read about your work and find out how to contact you.

If you opt for a website, it's important to include a bit about yourself, often on an 'About' page, images of your work, and your contact information. You could also include a CV detailing any exhibitions or projects you've worked on as well as any formal qualifications you want people to know about. Likewise, if you write, having a designated section for text-based work is a good idea.

Make sure that the language you use to talk about yourself on your website is the same as it is elsewhere. Marketing

yourself will be made easier by continuity. Also ensure that the access solutions you've been using on social media are present here, too. All website providers should offer ways to write alt texts but, if they don't, you can write out your own image descriptions. Consider, too, recording audio versions of any text you upload.

It is important your site is easy to navigate. Ease of use is appreciated more by an audience than fancy design. You also don't need to worry too much about anything technically complicated. Using website hosts such as [WordPress](#) and [Wix](#) will take a lot of the leg work out.

Which provider you choose will depend on the content of your practice and your own individual needs. Again, it's a good idea to look to those

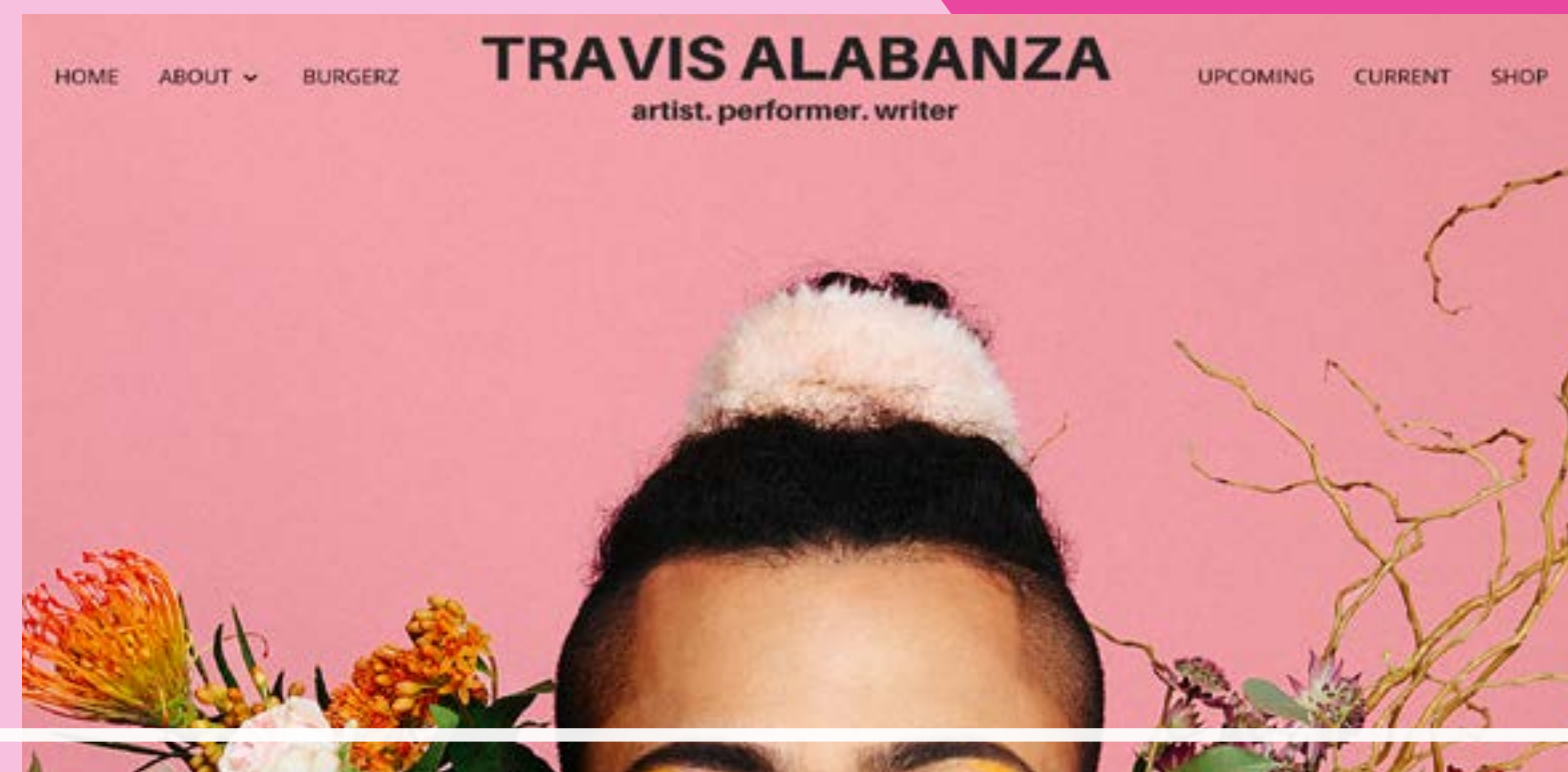
whose practice you like to see how they are doing it.

One of the most important parts of an artist website (and generally for marketing yourself online) is the documentation. How you capture your work will have a huge impact on how it is received. This doesn't mean you need a high-end camera or a photography degree. You just need to consider the composition of photographs carefully and take time to capture the energy of your work. If you can't photograph your work or your work is

digital, you might have to be more creative about how you embed it on your site.

It's also worthwhile considering the environmental impact of your website. You can use Website Carbon to check your site's carbon footprint. This is another reason why 'quality' of photographs is not always the same as resolution. Consider optimising any images you upload to the web before you do so!

Here's a great example from performer [Travis Alabanza](#):



Video and live events

Whether your practice is video-based or not, video content can be a good way to connect with your audience, be it live or pre-recorded. The kind of videos you share will depend on where you share them. Some sites, like Twitter and Instagram, have limits on the length of videos you can share. Facebook and Instagram also offer 'Live' platforms, where you can broadcast to all your followers in real time.

It's important that, where possible, you provide captions for your video content to make them accessible. This can seem like quite a daunting task but there are a lot of ways you can make it easier. The first is to creatively caption your content, meaning the captions are already built into your work in some way.

We like to use Kapwing for video content we share on social media. The free service has an automated captioning tool which you can edit



to make accurate, so the whole process is super speedy. Any video editing software will allow you to write your own, but it's good to think about ways to make the process more accessible for yourself, too.

When broadcasting or creating live video content, captioning becomes a bit trickier. You can use AI auto-captioners on software such as Zoom ([Otter](#), for example) or you can hire a Palantypist to write the captions as people speak. Organisations like [StageText](#) offer great advice on captioning live events! It's worth noting that some systems offer auto-captioning that isn't particularly accurate, like YouTube, so it's worth spending time making sure the systems you use are effective.

It's also important to acknowledge that captions aren't accessible for all either. Many deaf people require BSL interpretation. This can be expensive but is worth it if you're hosting live events online on a large scale. The best way to understand the needs of your audience is to engage with them and find out!

Here's artist Abi Palmer's advert for an event on Instagram Live

Advice on live content from our artists

Abi Palmer

If you're using video, doing tech and dress rehearsals just as you would if you were performing live is important.

Experimenting with a compelling visual setup on Instagram Live is good - you can stage manage what's going on around you and play with the screen a bit. It's such a small space that it's easy to be visually interesting by just choosing the right backdrop. Film yourself in different light positions and watch it back.

Rehearse talking to a screen in advance of an event! Watch it back - you'll feel incredibly awkward at first! If you have key points that you need to press, absolutely script them/bullet point them and have these notes somewhere visible.

Have a clock somewhere visible too if you've got time limits or a structure.

If you're going live, give people a minute to log in and find you by playing some music or having some informal chat rather than speaking all your most important info straight away.

If you're chatting with guests, make sure you also do tech rehearsals with them!

Ellie Harman-Taylor

Instagram TV is a great way to share longer content I think, and it stays on your Instagram page, so people can go back and watch it. (Here's [Ellie's Instagram page](#).)

Instagram lives between artists who have never met would be really interesting! Maybe these artists could Q&A each other and take questions from followers on a livestream.

Overall, I find the best thing is to be sharing as much as possible! Find independent artists with small followings and marginalised artists and share any pieces you love! They will usually share back and this way we're just strengthening and widening the reach of our community.



Here's an example of how we shared and captioned an interview with artist Poppy Nash!

